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ABSTRACT

The licensure of public school personnel in Tennessee is a function of the State Department of Education (SDE). Additional requirements for this certification function were added by the Comprehensive Education Reform Act (Senate Bill Number 1) of the 1984 Tennessee General Assembly. The Act mandated that the SDE use tests to assess the competence of initial teacher licensure applicants in three areas--basic communication skills; general knowledge; and professional knowledge. A statewide study has indicated that the Core Battery of the National Teacher Examinations and 24 of the 25 specialty area tests are valid for use in Tennessee. The State Board of Education has adopted recommendations for minimum qualifying scores. Five of six tests developed by a consortium of states with state-sponsored testing programs were also accepted, and minimum scores were defined. The development of subject-matter tests was still required for some areas because candidate tests were not available. Test development begins with the design of specifications by a subject-matter panel of experts. An item-writer team of experts then prepares a pool of items, subject to rigorous review, that is used to prepare multiple forms of the test for review by the Educational Testing Service--the technical assistance organization for development. Tests are under construction for: (1) economics; (2) history; (3) political science and government; (4) sociology; (5) accounting; (6) general science; (7) geography; and (8) office technology. Development of additional tests awaits the determination of specific needs. Full implementation of the provisions of the American College Testing program will require several years. (SLD)

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INITIAL TEACHER LICENSURE TESTING IN TENNESSEE: LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION

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Introduction

The Comprehensive Education Reform Act (Senate Bill No. 1) was passed in a Special Session of the 1984 Tennessee General Assembly and signed by Governor Lamar Alexander on March 6, 1984, following a year of study and modification of a bill proposed the previous year by the Governor. The act contained provisions that mandated new initiatives affecting many facets of public education, including programs and personnel. This paper is delimited to the legislative requirements and implementation dealing with the initial licensure of public school personnel in Tennessee.

Legislative Requirements

The licensure of public school personnel in Tennessee is a function that is delegated legally to the State Department of Education. This function, commonly called "certification", has been based historically on only the completion of a state-approved professional preparatory program and recommendation of the applicant to the state licensing agency by a designated official of the preparatory higher education institution. While these elements continue to be an integral part of the licensing procedure, additional requirements were introduced in the Comprehensive Education Reform Act of 1984.

Section 69 of the act stipulates the following:

(1) Applicants for initial certification/licensure must pass both a core test that measures basic communication skills, general knowledge, and professional knowledge and a standardized or criterion-referenced test for the desired area of endorsement.

(2) The Tennessee State Department of Education has the responsibility to develop or acquire, to validate, and to arrange for the administration of the tests that will be used.

(3) The tests utilized in the initial certification process must be

secure, that is, not available to potential applicants for review or other uses.

The effective date of the new requirements was July 1, 1984, or as soon thereafter as appropriate validation and standard-setting studies had been completed and minimum qualifying scores had been established.

The testing requirements specified in Section 69 applied to all future initial licensure applicants following the effective date of implementation. An additional provision of the legislation allowed the use of the core test (basic communication skills, general knowledge, and professional knowledge) as one alternative during only 1984-85 for currently licensured public school teachers to enter a career ladder structure.

Implementation

The Tennessee State Department of Education began the implementation of the legislative requirements on testing for initial teacher licensure immediately upon enactment of the Comprehensive Education Act of 1984. The tests used for licensure are being provided in two ways: (1) validation and establishment of minimum qualifying scores for available tests and (2) development of tests for endorsement areas without available tests. The strategies and status of efforts in these two areas are described below briefly.

Test Validation

The utilization of available tests for initial licensure of public school personnel must be preceded by studies to determine their validity for the intended use and the minimum scores required for applicants. Validity is viewed from the perspectives of both the opportunity to learn the content of the test during the relevant preparatory program and the relevance of the

content to competent performance as a beginning educational practitioner. The establishment of minimum scores is based on estimated performance of minimally qualified licensure applicants.

The functions performed in validating tests and recommending minimum scores involve several groups of persons. Higher education faculty members review the tests to make judgments on the congruence between test content and preparatory programs. Public school practitioners conduct the review to ascertain the job relevance of the test content. These two groups jointly participate in knowledge estimation for minimally qualified applicants. A special committee is constituted to make decisions on test validity and recommendations on minimum qualifying scores using the compiled data from the content review, job relevance review, and knowledge estimation functions.

In 1984, a statewide study was conducted with the NTE Core Battery and Specialty Area tests for potential use as initial licensure examinations in Tennessee. The results of the study indicated that the NTE Core Battery was valid to use in assessing the communication skills, general knowledge, and professional knowledge of initial licensure applicants. In addition, 23 of the 25 NTE Specialty Area test available at the time were valid to employ as endorsement area examinations. Minimum qualifying scores were also determined for the three NTE Core Battery tests and the 23 valid NTE Specialty Area tests.

The findings of the study were presented to the State Board of Education for action in June, 1984. The Board adopted the recommendations on minimum qualifying scores for initial licensure that included three increases in minimum scores over a period of years. The effective date for the minimum score requirements applicable to the three NTE Core Battery tests was September 1, 1984. Since many initial endorsements were not covered by the valid NTE

Specialty Area tests, action was delayed on minimum qualifying scores for these tests. The Board subsequently took action to require minimum scores effective on September 1, 1986, for 16 of the NTE Specialty Area tests that corresponded to 14 endorsements. (The Foreign Language endorsement required use of the French, German, or Spanish test.)

In 1988, 14 tests were included in a statewide study to determine their validity and minimum qualifying scores for initial licensure endorsement examinations in Tennessee. The examinations included eight NTE Specialty Area tests and six tests developed by a consortium of states with state-sponsored testing programs (SSTP). Three of the eight NTE tests were included in the 1984 study but were judged invalid previously or had been extensively revised.

The results of the study were that 12 of the 14 tests were determined to be valid for use as initial licensure endorsement area examinations in Tennessee. One NTE Specialty Area test and one SSTP test were judged as invalid for the intended use. Minimum qualifying scores were recommended for four NTE Specialty Area tests with sufficient number of examinees to provide normative data. With respect to the other three NTE Specialty Area tests and five SSTP tests, the recommendation was to require that initial licensure applicants seeking relevant endorsements submit scores on the appropriate tests without specifying minimum scores.

The recommendations from the 1988 study were considered by the State Board of Education in September, 1988. The Board adopted the recommendations regarding minimum test scores and submission of test scores effective on September 1, 1989. With respect to the required tests without minimum scores, the Board directed that recommendations on minimum scores should be made when sufficient normative data are available.

Test Development

The development of subject-matter tests is required for some endorsement areas because candidate tests are not available for potential validation. Personnel in the Tennessee State Department of Education identified 12 areas in 1986 for which test development was needed. Two public higher education institutions entered into agreements with the state education agency to develop tests for these areas. The developmental efforts began in the summer of 1987 and are expected to require about three years to complete.

The strategy used in the development of initial licensure endorsement area tests is designed to ensure that the tests are valid and to maximize the likelihood that they are reliable. Furthermore, procedures are utilized to avoid bias in the test content that would be discriminatory against special groups of examinees or offensive to potential examinees. Specific precautions are observed to maintain the confidentiality of test items that will be used in secure tests.

The test development process begins with a subject-matter expert panel of several persons developing test specifications that are reviewed by other specialists before the final specifications are formulated. An item writer team of subject-matter experts is selected, convened, and assigned responsibility for writing items based on the test specifications. The items are subjected to rigorous review and editing that deals with content, psychometric properties, bias, grammar, and format. The final pool of items is used to prepare multiple forms of the test for each subject-matter area that conform to the test specifications. The items are assembled into test forms, produced in ample quantity for utilization with licensure applicants, and administered to examinees. Item data and test score data are compiled to review and revise the test and to develop recommendations on minimum qualifying scores.

The first cycle of test development begun in 1987 focused on endorsement area tests for Economics, History, Political Science/Government, and Sociology. The final test specifications and the initial pool of items have been produced for these four areas. The items are currently being reviewed and revised by personnel at Educational Testing Service, the technical assistance organization for the developmental efforts. Tests for these areas are expected to be available for administration by the Fall of 1989.

The second cycle of test development was initiated in 1988 to prepare tests for the endorsements in Accounting, General Science, Geography, and Office Technology. The final test specifications for these four areas were completed in the Spring of 1988. The draft test items were produced by item writers from each specialized area in September, 1988. The item pools are being prepared for review and editing. The test should be ready for administration by the Winter of 1990.

The anticipated development of four additional licensure endorsement area tests is uncertain at the present time. Tests for two areas identified in 1986 will be available from other sources for potential validation. Approved public school courses are not existent for the two additional areas. The endorsement structure for licensure of public school personnel is also under review by the state education agency and the State Board of Education. Consequently, the development of additional tests must be delayed until specific needs can be identified.

Conclusions

The Comprehensive Education Reform Act of 1984 mandated that the Tennessee State Department of Education would utilize tests to assess the competence of initial teacher licensure applicants in three common areas (basic communication skills, general knowledge, and professional knowledge) and the desired

endorsement area. Tests have been validated and adopted for three common areas and 24 endorsement areas. Tests are under development for eight endorsement areas. Additional candidate endorsement area tests are expected to be included in a validation study during the Spring of 1989.

The use of tests to determine the eligibility of applicants for initial teacher licensure is a relatively recent phenomenon in this country. The validation of available tests has enabled the Tennessee State Department to start implementation of the legislative requirements regarding initial teacher licensure examinations beginning in 1984. The requirements for some endorsement areas can be met only be developing appropriate tests. The latter is obviously a much longer term and more expensive approach to provide the tests needed.

Full implementation of the initial teacher licensure testing program in Tennessee will require several years after enactment of the 1984 legislation. In addition to the time required to develop new tests, the use of these tests will require variable periods of time before an adequate item response and test score database is available to establish defensible minimum qualifying scores for teacher licensure applicants. Considerable progress has been made in implementing the initial teacher licensure testing program; however, much additional time and effort will be required to complete the implementation of the legislative mandate. The continuous provision of resources will be required to validate new forms and revised editions of validated tests, to develop additional forms of other tests, and to produce new tests for any new endorsement areas established by the State Board of Education.